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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000248

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STATE FOR AF/W
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WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: PDP MONOPOLY SET TO CONTINUE IN EBONYI STATE

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B and D)

11. (C) Summary: A March 28 visit by Poloff to Ebonyi State showed the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) dominance had no signs of abating. Ebonyi State Governor Sam Egwu has used patronage to make himself the dominant political figure in the State. Egwu chose previously unheralded Martin Elechi as the PDP gubernatorial candidate, and propelled him over better-known rivals to win the PDP primary. Opposition parties are weak and are expected to show little resistance to the PDP in the April election. End summary.

Patronage Politics Fuels Ebonyi Economy

12. (C) On March 28 Poloff visited Abakaliki, the capital of Ebonyi State. Abakaliki is a small city, and the roads are in good condition. However, there is a pronounced lack of commercial development. Ebonyi is the least populous and poorest state in the Southeast.

13. (C) Felix Uka, Correspondent for the Daily Independent, described Ebonyi to Poloff as a politically peculiar state. In Uka's description, Ebonyi is the poorest and most backward state in the Southeast, and everyone is dependent on government largesse. As a result, Ebonyi residents do not question the Governor.

14. (C) Prior to becoming governor, Sam Egwu was a lecturer in Abakaliki, but he has become the richest man in the state, owning a hotel and numerous houses, Uka said. Egwu's wife runs an international school and a nongovernmental organization. (Note: The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) investigation of Egwu is ongoing, and Ebonyi State commissioners have been called to Abuja to testify. However, Egwu has been recently cleared by the Code of Conduct Tribunal on charges brought to it against him. End Note) While people in Ebonyi personally like Egwu as good-spirited and personable, people tended to take advantage

of his naivete to cheat on contracts in the state, Uka commented.

Egwu Reveals a Surprise Choice

15. (C) With the opposition weak, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial primary attracted a panoply of candidates, Uka said. Primary voters looked for the person who promised the most money, and for a while former Federal Minister of Culture Frank Ogbuewu, armed with an impressive war chest, appeared the favorite. Egwu, noting that Ogbuewu was a favorite of Anambra State strongman Chris Uba, brother of Special Presidential Advisor Andy Uba, was concerned about losing control of the State to the Uba brothers. (reftel)

16. (C) Ogbuewu's appeal proved to be transitory. Uka explained to Poloff that there are two PDP blocs, the Abakaliki and the Afikpo blocs. To defeat Ogbuewu, Egwu chose the previously unheralded Martin Elechi, who is from the same bloc as Ogbuewu. While Ogbuewu and Senator Emma Agboti contested the primary, Egwu coerced all other PDP aspirants to drop out, and he then used his financial muscle to swing the primary toward Elechi.

17. (C) Vincent Ude-Umenta, Administrative Director of the PDP Gubernatorial and Presidential campaigns in Ebonyi, said Elechi's appointment was a complete surprise to Ebonyi insiders. In his seventies, Elechi's previous governing experience was as Minister of Public Works for the defunct East Ebonyi Central State. Uka said Elechi was a key player in the creation of Ebonyi in 1996. Although Elechi owes his primary victory to Egwu, observers see differences between the Governor and his putative successor. Uka and Ude-Umenta both said Elechi believed more in merit than did Egwu, and

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predicted Elechi would reform the civil service to assure merit. However, both agreed the question is whether Elechi can work within the patronage system Egwu created.

Opposition Forms "Operation Vigilance"
But Unlikely to Defeat Elechi

18. (C) The opposition appears weak and unable to seriously challenge the PDP. Uka considered Ogbonnaya Onu of the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) the strongest opposition candidate. Onu was the former governor of Abia State, but although Onu has had some large rallies, he lacks the resources to seriously challenge the PDP machine, Uka commented.

19. (C) Other opposition parties suffer from similar limitations. The All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) showed strength in 2003. While still popular, it has suffered defections and now appears leaner than before, Uka said. APGA gubernatorial candidate Anthony Oka, an attorney, lacks money or the grassroots organization to be competitive. Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) gubernatorial candidate Henry Udeh had a strong turnout at a recent rally and Uka felt the PPA has overtaken APGA in the State. However, the PPA does not pose a threat to the PDP's dominance.

110. (C) APGA's Oka told Poloff the PDP had planned to manipulate the vote. Oka complained the Ebonyi government was using Local Government Council (LGC) funds to fuel its campaign. According to Oka, the LGC funds were used to purchase rice for women who will work to tally the vote for Elechi. To fight this, Oka had invited fellow opposition candidates to join "Operation Vigilance", which would pool the opposition's resources to ensure a free and fair election. This group included all the main opposition candidates except for Onu, Oka said.

Violence Possible, but Elechi Expected to Win Easily

¶11. (C) If free and fair, the election would be very difficult for the PDP to win, Ukah postulated, because Elechi was not a prominent candidate and many PDP partisans were furious at the way Egwu commandeered the primary. Ukah thought some of the upset PDP primary contenders would lodge a protest vote, but he predicted the PDP machine would manipulate the vote to ensure victory.

¶12. (C) There are indications that violence could occur. Recently four policemen were kidnapped and two of them were murdered in Ebonyi. It is unknown who perpetrated this act, but the Ebonyi government blamed Senator Agboti, Elechi's primary rival. Ebonyi does have a history of political violence. In 2003, there was some political violence, according to Oka. Ude-Umanata, who worked on Lawrence Nwuruku's campaign when Nwuruku ran on the ANPP ticket in 2003, also commented that violence that year was severe.

Comment

¶13. (C) Although interlocutors referred to Ebonyi as a politically peculiar state, the patronage system Governor Egwu employs is a familiar one. PDP domination of Ebonyi, due to this system, appears set to continue. Opposition parties engender little respect. Elechi's election appears a fait accompli. This also should mean that the PDP presidential candidate should do well in Ebonyi. End comment.

BROWNE